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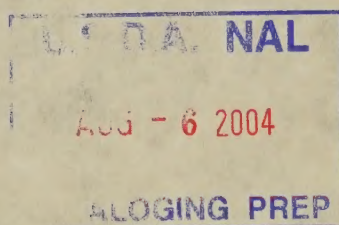
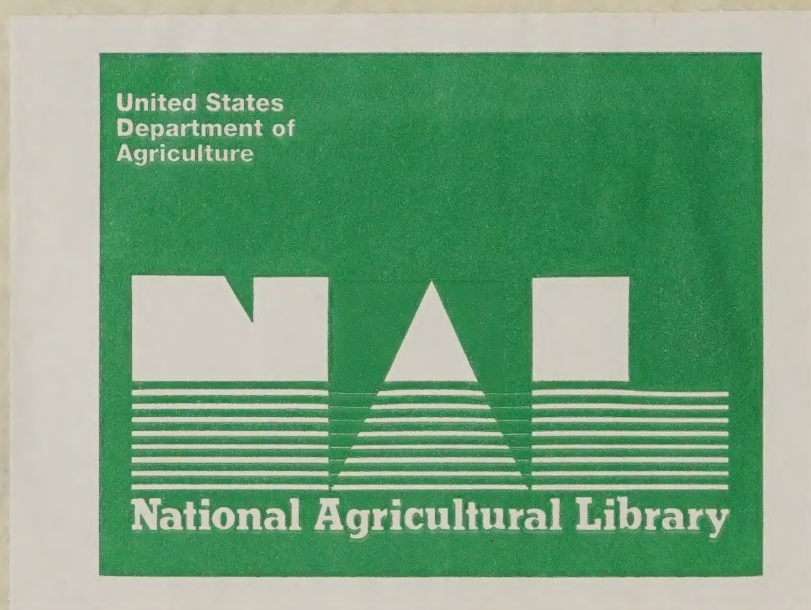
Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area

Record of Decision

USDA Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region
Nebraska National Forest
Pine Ridge Ranger District

Dawes and Sioux Counties, Nebraska





Background

The Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS's) for the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning have been prepared pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 40 CFR 1500-1508), the National Forest Management Act (NFMA, 36 CFR 219), and the Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Plan (LRMP). The Final EIS documents the analysis of a "No Action – no grazing" alternative and two action alternatives to address desired conditions described in the LRMP. Chapter 5 of the Final EIS responds to individual, organization and government agency comments on the Draft EIS.

The Nebraska National Forest proposes to continue to permit livestock grazing on 33 of the 34 allotments within the Pine Ridge Geographic Area (PRGA), while meeting Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) direction which provides for a wide range of values and uses. The proposed action is designed to improve the trends in vegetation, watershed conditions, and in ecological sustainability relative to livestock grazing within the PRGA. Two primary influences help to shape the need for this project: 1) the Rescission Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-19, Section 504) directed the Forest Service to complete NEPA analysis on all grazing allotments within a given timeframe; 2) the revised LRMP establishes goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines for resource management on the Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units. This analysis will comply with the above direction. The final environmental impact statement (FEIS) documents the analysis of three separate alternatives to meet this need.

Changes Between Draft and Final EIS

Attachment A clarifies previously disclosed resources effects, corrects and amends previously disclosed information, and updates the effects based on the best information available at the time of my decision. I do not believe that the additions, deletions, updated information, and additional analysis displayed in Attachment A resulted in any substantive change to alternatives or represented significantly new impacts than displayed in the Draft EIS. The update to the effects disclosed in the Final EIS resulting from the aforementioned changes fell within the scope of the analysis depicted in the Draft EIS. Therefore, I have decided that issuance of a supplemental Draft EIS is not warranted. A Final EIS has been produced with these minor changes incorporated.

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Decision

Based upon my careful review of the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning FEIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), my decision is to select Alternative 3, the Proposed Action, which primarily responds to: 1) the Rescission Act of 1995 (P.L. 104-19, Section 504) directing the Forest Service to complete NEPA analysis on all grazing allotments; and 2) the revised LRMP goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines for resource management on the Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units. The decision allows livestock grazing (domestic livestock or bison) using adaptive management. *Adaptive management is defined as a process where land managers implement management practices that are designed to meet LRMP standards and guidelines, and would likely achieve the desired conditions in a timely manner. If monitoring shows that desired conditions, as described by LRMP Direction, are not being met, then an alternate set of management actions would be implemented to achieve the desired results.* Livestock grazing would be implemented on 33 of

34 allotments on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area, incorporating adaptive management to meet the LRMP goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines. Refer to the Final EIS, Chapter 2.3 for a detailed discussion of Alternative 3.

In reaching my decision, I reviewed the management practices that are designed to meet the LRMP standards and guidelines. These practices have been analyzed and are available to be incorporated in the development of Allotment Management Plans. Some practices alone may not meet the desired condition, but in combination with other practices from the “toolbox”, desired conditions may then be met. For example, a 2-unit deferred grazing system alone may not provide the desired conditions, but when coupled with light grazing intensity, desired conditions would likely be met.

Grazing Management Toolbox
Adjust stocking rate to Light Grazing Intensity (LRMP Appendix. I)
Adjust stocking rate to Moderate Grazing Intensity (LRMP Appendix. I)
Adjust stocking rate to Heavy Grazing Intensity (LRMP Appendix. I)
Implement riparian grazing dates – no livestock use from 6/15 – 9/20
Implement alternative riparian grazing dates based upon specific conditions (topography, range rider, upland water sources, livestock use patterns)
Incorporate a range rider to move livestock from riparian areas (herding)
Change season of use and/or livestock utilization days – do not exceed permitted AUMs (stocking rate)
Change animal numbers – do not exceed permitted AUMs (stocking rate)
Change animal class – do not exceed permitted AUMs (stocking rate)
Defer livestock turn-on date
Rest from livestock grazing for two or more seasons
Do not allow livestock grazing
Construct fence to create riparian unit – allow grazing under riparian grazing dates
Construct fence to exclude livestock from areas of concern (riparian, wooded draws, springs, wetlands, etc.)
Construct temporary electric fence to control livestock distribution patterns
Construct permanent electric fence to control livestock distribution patterns
Control livestock distribution patterns using water (turn water on or off at developed water sites)
Control livestock distribution patterns using prescribed burning
Control livestock distribution patterns by constructing and/or removing cross fences
Construct livestock water development (pipeline, tanks, windmill, well, stock dam, submersible pump, solar)
Remove existing development (fence, pipeline, tanks, windmill, well, stock dam)
Implement 2-unit deferred grazing system
Implement 3-unit deferred grazing system
Implement 4 or greater-unit deferred grazing system
Implement rest-rotation grazing system
Implement multiple unit rotation with permittees private land
Rehabilitate areas seeded to introduced grass species back to native grass, shrub and forb species
Enhance riparian hardwood regeneration by planting native hardwoods and shrubs

Implementation of rotational grazing systems, rangeland structure improvements, removal of rangeland structure improvements, critical area (wetlands) protection, riparian protection and

enhancement will be completed within the next 10 years after issuance of the Record of Decision. The need for livestock grazing adjustments during drought will be evaluated and implemented as appropriate. Guidelines from the drought handbook "Drought Management on Range and Pastureland" (Nebraska Cooperative Extension EC 91-123) will be consulted for drought related management guidance.

The following table provides a summary of proposed management activities to be implemented as a result of my Decision.

Allotment Name	Alt. 3. Proposed Action	Actions Taken or Change in Management from Current Conditions
Aristocrat Butte (PR28)	Rest rotation Yr. 1 5/20-8/25 Yr. 2 rest Yr. 3 6/24-9/29 3.26 months 85 yearlings (70 on NFS)	96 less AUMs 70 days less use Change in class of livestock, increase in numbers of livestock Develop water between PR28 and PR 29 1 mile of fence on NFS and private land boundary
Aspen (PR11)	No change	1.25 mile of fence on West Ash Road ROW to reduce trespass livestock use
Barrel Butte (PR60, PR60A, PR60B)	Modified two pasture rotation Yr. 1 5/29-10/4 Yr. 2 6/1-10/7 4.29 month 25 cow/calf, 1 bull	10 less AUMs 9 days less use, 8-13 days later turn-on date, 3 days later off-date
Big Bordeaux (PR37N, PR37S, PR37E)	No change in AUMs Three pasture rotation 5/16-10/15 5.09 months 34 cow/calf, 2 bulls, 65 yearlings	No change in AUMs .75 mile of fence to exclude Big Bordeaux Creek in Unit 37S-no livestock use Reduce the size of the water-gap in 37N, remove water-gap in 37E
Brickner (PR38)	No change	No change
Chadron Creek (PR24A-F)	Four pasture rotation system 6/1-11/27 6 months 103 cow/calf, 5 bulls --- Season-long fall use 10/1-11/30 2.03 months 4 horses	No change in AUMs Cattle - 12 day later turn on and off date Horses - 30 day earlier on and off date Remove 1 mile of fence, remove water-gap in PR24C, develop water in PR24C, Fence spring in PR24F from livestock
Cherry Creek (PR51, PR51A)	Season-long continuous grazing 5/21-10/15 4.93 month 28 cow/calf, 2 bulls	51 less AUMs 4 days less use, 4 days later turn-on date
Collons (PR35, PR35N, PR35M, PR35S)	No change	No change in AUMs Remove water-gap Develop water

Allotment Name	Alt. 3. Proposed Action	Actions Taken or Change in Management from Current Conditions
Dairy (PR6, PR7)	No change	No change in AUMs 1 mile of fence on boundary line
Deadhorse (PR20, PR20A)	Annually 7/20 – 10/8 <i>2.70 months</i> 75 cow/calf No livestock use in PR20A	No change in AUMs Change season of use to 7/20-10/8 Construct .75 mile pipeline, install tank Extend riparian exclosure fence in PR20A to the south to exclude additional riparian area from livestock
Deadman Creek (PR52E, PR52W)	Allow 124 AUMs use by existing permittees	No change in AUM capacity
East Ash (PR14, PR15, PR16)	No change in AUMs Four pasture rotation No livestock use in PR16W riparian unit, split herds in rotation Implement riparian grazing dates for PR16E, PR14 Continue range rider 5/15 – 10/5 <i>4.75 months</i> 164 cow/calf, 7 bulls	No change in AUMs Remove 1.75 miles fence, construct 3.75 miles new fence in PR16 & PR15, Construct 2 water developments in PR16, 1 water development between PR14 & PR12, 1 water development in PR15, remove water-gap in PR15, decommission well in PR15
Flannigan Butte (PR26, PR47)	No change in AUMs Season-long continuous grazing on PR47 5/15 – 10/15 – PR47 (100 AUMs On NFS land) Fall use on PR26 9/1 – 10/15 - PR26 <i>5.13 months</i> 90 cow/calf, 4 bulls	No change in AUMs Construct .5 mile of fence to exclude livestock from spring & wooded draw in PR26 Develop water between PR25 and PR47 Construct 1 mile of fence & remove .5 mile to include NFS land in PR26 within PR47
Gobbler (PR39, PR40, PR43)	No change in AUMs Modify three pasture rotation, utilize Unit 39 in fall 2 out of 3 years	No change in AUMs Construct .75 mile fence in PR39 on NFS and private land boundary
Hallsted (PR42A-D)	No change in AUMs, Implement two pasture rotation 5/16 – 9/30 <i>4.47 months</i> 57 cow/calf, 2 bulls	No change in AUMs Remove water-gap in PR42N Remove 1 mile fence to create 2 pastures rather than 4 Develop water in PR42N
Homestead (PR29)	Season-long continuous grazing 6/1-10/19 <i>4.70 months</i> 42 cow/calf, 2 bulls	33 less AUMs 12 days less use 16 day later turn-on-date, 4 day later off-date Develop water between PR29 and PR28
Horseshoe (PR1N, PR1S, PR1AN, PR1AS)	No change	No change in AUMs

Allotment Name	Alt. 3. Proposed Action	Actions Taken or Change in Management from Current Conditions
King's Canyon (PR33, PR61, 33A)	Two pasture rotation 5/20-10/10 <i>4.79 month</i> 61 cow/calf, 3 bulls (54 cow/calf on NFS)	17 less AUMs 10 days less use 5 day later turn-on date and 5 day earlier off date
Little Creek (PR12S, PR12W)	No change in AUMs 7 unit pasture rotation with private lands Not to exceed 190 AUMs on NFS land	No change in AUMs Construct 1 mile of fence in PR12S on private and NFS boundary line Develop water between PR12S and PR14
Lower Sawlog (PR0, PR01, PR4)	Three pasture rotation with private land utilized in mid-season and implement riparian grazing dates Yr. 1 5/5-6/15, 8/11-9/30 Yr. 2 5/5-7/25, 9/20-9/30 <i>3.08 months</i> 24 cow/calf, 1 bull	26 less AUMs 47 days less use Increase of 4 cow/calf pair to meet lower limit requirement
Rattlesnake Butte (PR25)	No change	No change in AUMs Construct .25 mile of fence to exclude livestock from spring Develop water between PR26 and PR25
Roberts (PR17, PR17E, PR17W, PR17N)	No change	No change in AUMs Shared well in PR17W and PR16
Rock Canyon (PR5)	Season-long continuous grazing 6/1-10/1 <i>4.10 month</i> 29 cow/calf and 2 bulls (6 cow/calf on NFS)	8 less AUMs 30 less days use, 30 days earlier off-date
Sandy Trail (PR27)	Mid-season grazing 6/15-9/10 <i>2.93 month</i> 20 cow/calf and 1 bull	4 less AUMs 4 days less use, 14 day later turn-on date, 10 day later off-date
School Section (PR34)	Allow 115 AUMs utilization by existing permittees where appropriate	No change in recommended AUM capacity Construct pipeline and install tank
Scott (PR44, PR46)	No change	No change in AUMs
Slicker (PR30A, PR30B, PR30C)	Three pasture rotation 5/25-10/7 <i>4.53 month</i> 186 cow/calf and 6 bulls (29 cow/calf on NFS)	58 less AUMs 11 days less use, 7 day later turn-on date, 4 day earlier off-date Develop water in 30B

Allotment Name	Alt. 3. Proposed Action	Actions Taken or Change in Management from Current Conditions
Soldier Creek (PR53NW, PR53NE, PR53SW, PR53SE)	No change in AUMs Four pastures-riparian units grazed in fall and spring Herds split first 42 days in spring in PR53NE, PR53SW utilized from 5/10-6/20, PR53SW utilized 6/21-7/31 and PR53NW utilized 8/1-9/30 Continue range rider Allow periodic livestock use for resource mgmt. in PR53A-fish ponds; PR53C-campground; and PR53NE (along riparian unit on the South Fork) 5/10 – 9/30 4.76 months 240 cow/calf, 10 bulls	No change in AUMs Remove woven wire in lane in PR53NE
Steffensen (PR21, PR22)	No change	No change in AUMs
Strong Canyon (PR41W, PR41M, PR41E)	No change	No change in AUMs
Table Road PR13, PR15A)	No change	No change in AUMs
Trunk Butte (PR19N, PR19S, PR18)	Employ a range rider Utilize riparian Unit 18 in the fall with a range rider Utilize riparian Unit 19N in the spring following riparian grazing dates Utilize upland pasture Unit 19S in middle of season 5/20-10/9 4.76 month 75 cows, 40 yearlings, 80 cow/calf and 3 bulls	80 less AUMs 11 days less use, 11 day earlier off-date Construct fence to exclude livestock from spring in PR18 on Trunk Butte Creek drainage
West Ash (PR8, PR9, PR10, PR11A)	No change	No change in AUMs Reduce size of water-gap in PR9
Wetterstrom (PR31W, PR31M, PR31E)	No change	No change in AUMs Remove steel tanks from the north well in PR31M and replace with rubber tire tank

My decision is subject to the following terms, conditions and requirements:

1) Implementation and Monitoring

Implement the following rangeland improvement practices. These proposed practices are designed to move resource conditions towards or to meet the desired conditions in a timely manner.

Allotment/Unit	Improvement	Planned Year	Estimated Implementation Cost
East Ash/15	Water well, east side	2004	\$5574
Big Bordeaux/Unit 37S	Riparian Exc. Fence .75 mi.	2004	\$4000
Big Bordeaux/Unit 37E	Water-gap removal	2004	\$600
Deadhorse Riparian Enclosure	Riparian Exc. Fence .31 mi	2004	\$1600
East Ash/16	Water well w/17W	2004	\$4500
East Ash/16E	Cunningham Riparian Fence .64 mi.	2004	\$3266
Hallsted/42N	Water-gap removal .14 mi.	2004	\$600
Trunk Butte/18	Spring exc. fence .31 mile	2004	\$1434
Hallsted/42A-D	Remove fence 1 mi.	2004	\$0
East Ash /16	Water well, west side	2005	\$4500
East Ash/16	Riparian Fence – East Ash 1.1 mi.	2005	\$5633
East Ash/14	Water well w/Unit 12S	2006	\$5200
East Ash/14	Riparian Pasture fence .8 mi. new, 1.4 mi. removal	2006	\$4097 \$4065
East Ash/14	Water-gap removal-big Spring	2006	\$1200
Chadron Creek/24C	Water well	2007	\$5200
Chadron Creek/24C-24D	Fence removal 1 mi.	2007	\$500
Chadron Creek/24C	Remove water-gap	2007	\$1164
Soldier Creek/PR53NE	Remove woven wire fence	2007	\$500
Flannigan Butte/26	Water-well with Unit 25	2008	\$5700
Hallsted/42N	Water well replacement	2008	\$4500
Rattlesnake/25	Spring exc. .25 mile	2008	\$1280
West Ash/10	Reduce water-gap	2008	\$500
Lower Sawlog/4	Stock tank at windmill, submersible pump	2009	\$330 \$800
Flannigan Butte/26	Spring & wooded draw enclosure .5 mi.	2009	\$2560
Flannigan Butte/26	Fence on-line 1 mi., remove .5 mi. fence	2009	\$4382
Gobbler/39	Fence on-line between private & NFS 1.2 mi.	2010	\$3072
Slicker/30B	Water well/tank	2010	\$5500
Homestead/29	Water well w/28	2011	\$4500
Little Creek/12S	Fence on-line between private & NFS 1 mi.	2011	\$2560
Wetterstrom/31M	Remove tanks from draw, replace with rubber tank at windmill	2011	\$750
Roberts/17N	Wooded draw exc. maintenance	2011	\$800
Aristocrat Butte/28	Fence between NFS and private – 1 mi.	2012	\$2561
Aspen/11	Fence between NFS and private and West Ash Road – 1.25 mi.	2012	\$6402
East Ash/15	Remove tank/well	2012	\$300
Summary*			
Implementation Year			Annual Projected Costs
Year 2004			\$13,574
Year 2005			\$10,133
Year 2006			\$14,562
Year 2007			\$ 7,364

Year 2008	\$11,980
Year 2009	\$ 8,072
Year 2010	\$ 8,572
Year 2011	\$ 8,610
Year 2012	\$ 9,263

* USDA Forest Service. 2004. Implementation and Monitoring Plan for the PRGA Rangeland Allotment Planning).

Monitoring will consist of implementation monitoring and effectiveness monitoring. Project implementation monitoring monitors compliance with LRMP standards and guidelines. Effectiveness monitoring evaluates how effective our management actions are at achieving desired outcomes.

Implement the following monitoring plan for each allotment to ensure that the resource conditions are moving towards or meeting the desired conditions in a timely manner.

Range Readiness / Riparian Stubble Height – short-term every 1-2 years
Riparian/Wooded Draw Regeneration – short-term every 2-5 years
Visual Obstruction Readings (VOR) / Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) &
Riverine/Woody Regeneration / Range condition – long-term every 5-10 years

Allotment	Trigger Point/Monitoring Methodology
Aristocrat Butte	Allotment Inspection
Aspen	Allotment Inspection
Barrel Butte	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Big Bordeaux	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration
Brickner	Allotment Inspection
Chadron Creek	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Cherry Creek	Allotment Inspection
Collons	Allotment Inspection, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration
Dairy	Allotment Inspection
Dead Horse	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Deadman Creek	Allotment Inspection
East Ash	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Flannigan Butte	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration
Gobbler	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Hallstead	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition
Homestead	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition
Horseshoe	Allotment Inspection
King's Canyon	Allotment Inspection
Little Creek	Allotment Inspection
Lower Sawlog	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Rattlesnake Butte	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR
Roberts	Allotment Inspection, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration
Rock Canyon	Allotment Inspection
Sandy Trail	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition

School Section	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition
Scott	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Range Condition
Slicker	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition
Soldier Creek	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Steffensen	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR
Strong Canyon	Allotment Inspection, Upland VOR, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Table Road	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition
Trunk Butte	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
West Ash	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition, PFC, Riverine/Woody Regeneration, Stubble Height
Wetterstrom	Allotment Inspection, Range Condition
Summary*	
Implementation Year	Annual Projected Costs
Year 2005	\$ 7,838
Year 2006	\$11,513
Year 2007	\$13,423
Year 2008	\$ 9,247
Year 2009	\$ 8,447
Year 2010	\$12,422
Year 2011	\$12,789
Year 2012	\$ 9,372
Year 2013	\$ 8,662
Year 2014	\$ 8,866

* USDA Forest Service. 2004. Implementation and Monitoring Plan for the PRGA Rangeland Allotment Planning).

2) Management Indicator Species Monitoring

Sharp-tailed grouse occurrence and associated display ground survey activities across the Pine Ridge Geographic Area have been occurring since the 1970's. From 1993 to 2002 a more concerted effort was initiated to identify traditional display grounds and associated breeding male birds. Although this information has been important in identifying the distribution of the species, the manner in which it was collected does not allow population trends across the geographic area to be determined. Forest Service biologists are working with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologists to establish additional monitoring protocols in the PRGA to assess population trends.

Information on current grassland structure levels is available only for spring 2004. These cover levels represent annual herbage production during the 2003 growing and grazing season. Precipitation levels and growing conditions were less than normal during this period. Structural levels during this period indicated that approximately 5-10% of the larger grassland parks supported high grass structure after the summer growing season. Had precipitation and growing conditions been closer to normal, the desired condition of 10-20% specified in the LRMP would likely have been met. Monitoring over the next 2 years will add to our baseline grassland structure data.

3) Specific Management Requirements

These measures are additional management actions that will be followed if applicable to the allotment or management activity.

- 1) Seed areas that are disturbed by rangeland improvements. Use species in a seed mixture that provides forage or cover for wildlife and reduces soil erosion. Seed mixes will include native forbs, shrubs, and/or grasses.
- 2) Avoid all significant fossil and cultural resource sites when conducting any ground-disturbing projects. During ground disturbing activities such as installing water pipelines, a Forest Service Paleontologist is required to be present to monitor for any impact to paleontological resources and to remove any paleontological specimens according to professional standards or identification of avoidance measures.
- 3) During ground disturbing activities that penetrates the bedrock, personnel are to be aware of any paleontological resources and stop construction when vertebrate fossils are impacted and notify a Forest Service Paleontologist.
- 4) During ground disturbing activities such as installing water pipelines, a journey-level Forest Service Biologist/Botanist is required to survey the area to determine absence or presence of nesting migratory birds. These results will be documented. If one or more active bird nests cannot be avoided by impact, the USFWS Nebraska Field Office will be contacted.

Rationale for the Decision

I carefully reviewed the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning EIS and have decided to select Alternative 3, allow livestock grazing using adaptive management. The basis of my decision to allow permitted livestock grazing under Alternative 3 is that adaptive management allows for the following:

- a) Identifying set defined limits using adaptive management principles of what is allowed, such as timing, intensity, frequency and duration of livestock grazing. These limits set standards that can be checked through monitoring to determine if actions prescribed were followed, and if changes are needed in management.
- b) Utilizing an interdisciplinary planning and implementation process that provides identification of site-specific desired conditions; a definition of management constraints to guide management; identification of pre-determined optional courses of action, to be used to make adjustments in management over time; and establish a carefully focused project monitoring to be used to make adjustments in management over time.
- c) Building flexibility into management allowing for decisions that are responsive to needed adjustments in permitted actions.
- d) Focusing on factors that are essential to ensure management objectives and/or desired conditions are met.
- e) A decision that can remain viable for an extended period of time as long as there is periodic review of the actions for consistency with the NEPA-based decision.

My decision will continue to permit livestock grazing under management systems designed to meet LRMP standards and guidelines. This included my review of the alternatives considered for eliminating grazing completely, and maintaining current management. I have selected

Alternative 3 because it provides the greatest attainment of the project's purpose and need, as well as a reasonable response to the public issues and concerns.

I carefully studied the issues identified for this project during the scoping and public involvement process. The following key issues were identified in the FEIS, and were a major consideration in my decision:

- 1) Issue Statement: Changes in livestock management strategies will impact the financial well being of the permittees and the local economies.

Overall, minimal economic impacts are expected from Alternative 3. Several individual permittees may require a financial investment, however, these improvements are scheduled for implementation over 10-year period, which will help distribute the expenses. This alternative will have minimal financial impacts to the local economy.

- 2) Issue Statement: Livestock grazing negatively impacts natural ecosystems. This includes over utilization of native upland grasslands and desirable nonnative plant communities, resulting in negative impacts to animal communities; reducing riparian and wooded draw plant regeneration; reducing ponderosa pine forest regeneration; lack of grazing will increase areas of hazardous fuels; and livestock grazing will impact habitats of threatened, endangered, sensitive, management indicator, and local concern species.

Upland rangeland conditions will be managed for more vegetative diversity than either Alternative 1 or 2. Upland rangeland conditions will likely trend upward more quickly due to changes in management.

Under this alternative 24 riparian/wooded draw areas will continue in an upward trend, one would move from static/down to an upward trend, 14 riparian/wooded draw areas will move from downward to an upward trend, five areas will move from static to an upward trend, two will remain static, and three areas will remain in down trend, but only in water-gap areas that are proposed to be reduced in size. Riparian/wooded draw areas will likely increase in plant regeneration due to implementation of Alternative 3. This alternative will benefit riparian/wooded draw areas and perennial water sources more than Alternative 2. Any sedimentation into perennial streams will be minimized and could provide beneficial effects in the long-term.

There will be no effect on ponderosa pine stands outside of localized impacts in heavily used areas. If livestock numbers or utilization days were increased substantially, compaction and tree damage will increase. The addition of fences or water developments will alter livestock use patterns in specific allotments. This could change areas of impacts, but the relatively light stocking should not greatly impact pine stands.

The continued annual livestock grazing on most grass-dominated areas will reduce and/or prevent accumulation of the amount of fine fuel buildup, contributing to a reduced rate of fire spread across the landscape. Areas managed for high structure may result in some localized increase in fire behavior.

A “may adversely impact individuals”, but not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning unit, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range-wide” determination for five Forest Service sensitive species (Fringed myotis, Grasshopper sparrow, Lewis’ woodpecker, N. Leopard frog and Yellow-billed cuckoo) will likely occur. Four of the “may adversely impact individuals...” determinations (Grasshopper sparrow, Fringed myotis, Lewis’s woodpecker, and Northern leopard frog) could result in some localized negative impacts to individuals, but impacts to these species and their habitats in the long-term should be beneficial. Beneficial impacts will likely occur to nine priority species (elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, trout, meadow jumping mouse, Lark bunting, Bell’s vireo, Dickcissel, and Bobolink). A negative impact for one species (mountain lion); and neutral impacts for four species (wild turkey, dark-eyed junco, Swainson’s hawk, and prairie falcon) will likely occur.

Amount of quality habitat (moderate to high structure) for MIS plains sharp-tailed grouse and other associated wildlife will increase slightly and provide a higher probability of meeting the habitat objective (10-20% high structure) in the LRMP for sharp-tailed grouse when compared to Alternative 2. Long-term population trends of MIS sharp-tailed grouse in the project area are unknown. Probability of a stable to increasing population trend is slightly higher than Alternative 2, but less than Alternative 1. However, Alternative 3 will still likely meet the population objective in the LRMP for sharp-tailed grouse.

- 3) Issue Statement: Livestock grazing negatively impacts recreational activities and experiences because of associated structures (fences, gates, etc) impede recreationist travel.

Impacts to recreational activities and experiences may occur. Unlike Alternative 2, Alternative 3 will allow for more flexibility in management allowing for decisions that are responsive to identified recreational conflicts.

I carefully reviewed the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Nebraska National Forest. I found that the LRMP identified grazing as an appropriate management tool to meet LRMP goals, objectives and direction.

- I carefully reviewed the cumulative effects of the project with particular emphasis on threatened, endangered and special status species. The United States Department of Interior, Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance, states in their letter dated January 6, 2004 that “We concur that implementation of the preferred alternative (Alternative 3) will have no effect on federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, or their designated critical habitat.” I also noted that while there may be impacts on individual sensitive species, these impacts would not likely result in a loss of species viability. I also find that the project’s effects are in compliance with the Management Indicator Species requirements from the LRMP. Sharp-tailed grouse occurrence and associated display ground survey activities are ongoing. Forest Service biologists are working with NGPC biologists to establish additional monitoring protocols in the PRGA to assess population trends. Information on current grassland structure levels is available only for spring 2004. Structural levels during this period indicated that approximately 5-10% of the larger grassland parks supported high grass structure after a below-normal summer growing season. Had precipitation and growing conditions been closer to normal, the desired condition of 10-

20% specified in the LRMP will likely have been met. Monitoring over the next 2 years will add to our baseline grassland structure data. I also noted that grazing activities would result in 2-4 % of suitable rangelands being rested. The LRMP direction for rested suitable rangeland is between 1% and 10%. (FEIS Section 2.5).

I reviewed the cumulative effects on all other resources (riparian/wooded draw, etc.) analyzed in the FEIS and found no indications that any of the affects that may occur as a result of the project will compromise the direction, goals, standards, and guidelines contained in the LRMP.

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives, which are discussed briefly below. Alternative 3 was the environmentally preferred alternative. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS, Chapter 2 Section 2.5 *Comparison of Alternatives Considered*.

Based on available data and public involvement, a full range of reasonable alternatives for the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area were developed and analyzed in the FEIS. Three alternatives were analyzed in detail, including the no action alternative. In addition to the three alternatives analyzed in detail, nine other alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. The nine alternatives eliminated from detailed study are described in the FEIS, Chapter 2 Section 2.4. The two alternatives analyzed in detail that were not selected are briefly described below, including the reasons for non-selection. For a more complete discussion of alternative development, refer to the FEIS, Chapter 2.

Alternative 1 (No Action) – No livestock grazing would be implemented. As provided for in FSH 2209.13, R2 ID_2209.13_2004-7 Chapter 90 Section 92.31 and/or 94.1, the “no action” alternative shall always be fully developed and analyzed in detail. “No action” is synonymous with “no grazing” and means that livestock grazing would not be authorized within the project area.

I did not select this alternative because it does not meet the purpose and need of the project and because of the following:

- Plant species composition in the PRGA would likely move most areas to a later seral stage providing less diversity. Early seral may be reduced to 0% if vegetation is not utilized. LRMP species composition direction may not be met (FEIS Section 3.7.2).
- Vegetative grass structure would likely increase in those allotments that are currently at or below moderate levels. LRMP vegetative grass structure direction may not be met (FEIS Section 3.7.2).
- Removal of grazing activities would result in 100% of suitable rangelands being rested. The LRMP direction for rested suitable rangeland is between 1% and 10%. (FEIS Section 2.5).
- Removal of grazing activities would result in no ground disturbance, with exception to removal of structures if funding and resources allowed. Fewer paleontological resource sites would be discovered (FEIS Section 3.5.2).
- No grazing would increase the amounts of fine fuels in grass-dominated areas with an expected increase in wildfire risks and fire rate of spread (FEIS Section 3.6.2).

- Elimination of all grazing would likely result in about half of the permittees primary source of income being at risk, with many ranching operations going out of business. This alternative may have a minor negative impact on the economy, but would have a major impact on multiple ranching operations and family units. This would impact local communities due to ranching operations closing and people leaving the area. This would not assist local communities that are trying to maintain a lifestyle that includes ranching (FEIS Section 3.10.2).

Alternative 2 (Current Management) - As provided for in FSH 2209.13, R2 ID_2209.13_2004-7 Chapter 90 Section 92.31 and/or 94.1, current management should also be analyzed in detail as an alternative to the proposed action if current management meets the stated purpose and need for action. The current management may also be the proposed action when current management is determined to be consistent with the LRMP and has been shown to be effective in meeting resource objectives through monitoring over time. Some current AMPs have had livestock numbers or season of use modified, but total permitted animal unit months have not changed. This alternative would require an amendment to the current LRMP. This alternative is similar in design to Alternative 3 but does not include adaptive management strategies and activities.

I did not select this alternative because it does not meet the purpose and need of the project and because of the following:

- Removal of grass may contribute to pine encroachment into open grasslands (FEIS Section 3.6.3).
- Livestock over-browsing on deciduous species in certain identified allotments would occur (FEIS Section 3.6.3).
- Grazing activities would result in 2% of suitable rangelands being rested. The LRMP direction for rested suitable rangeland is between 1% and 10%. (FEIS Section 2.5).
- Some riparian areas would continue to be impacted from livestock presence and utilization (FEIS Section 3.3.3).
- LRMP species composition direction may not be met (FEIS Section 3.7.3).
- LRMP vegetative grass structure direction may not be met (FEIS Section 3.7.3).
- A “may adversely impact individuals...” determination for six Forest Service sensitive species would likely occur (only one species with beneficial effects in the long-term), negative impacts to seven species of local concern, and neutral impacts to six species of local concern. The amount of quality habitat for plains sharp-tailed grouse (MIS) would likely remain unchanged and would be less than Alternative 1 and slightly less than Alternative 3 (FEIS Section 3.8.3).
- May impact recreational experiences (FEIS Section 3.9.3).

Public and Other Agency Involvement

Public involvement in this project began in September 2002 when the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning was included in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). This project has appeared quarterly in the SOPA since that issue.

On March 7, 2003, a scoping letter detailing a proposed action for an Environmental Analysis (EA) was mailed to approximately 81 individuals and organizations that had indicated an interest

in receiving notification of proposed activities on the Pine Ridge Ranger District. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the Forest Service sought information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, local agencies, tribes, and other individuals or organizations that may be interested in, or affected by, the proposal. The scoping activities included engaging potentially affected or interested parties by written correspondence, and contacting those on our Forest media list.

Using the scoping comments from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included 1) Changes in livestock management strategies will impact the financial well being of the permittees and the local economies; 2) Livestock grazing negatively impacts natural ecosystems. This includes over utilization of native upland grasslands and desirable nonnative plant communities, resulting in negative impacts to animal communities; reducing riparian and wooded draw plant regeneration; reducing ponderosa pine forest regeneration; lack of grazing will increase areas of hazardous fuels; and livestock grazing will impact habitats of threatened, endangered, sensitive, management indicator, and local concern species; and 3) Livestock grazing negatively impacts recreational activities and experiences because of associated structures (fences, gates, etc) impede recreationist travel.

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was published in *The Federal Register* on June 19, 2003. Three responses were received. The DEIS was made available for public review and comment on November 28, 2003 Federal Register/Vol. 68 publication of the Notice of Availability. Notices were sent on November 19 and 25, 2003 to *The Chadron Record*, local newspaper and radio stations, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, Congressional delegations, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, State of Nebraska Department of Water Quality, individuals, grazing permittees, and organizations. On December 19, 2003, a letter describing availability of the DEIS for review and comment was sent again to permitted grazing permittees asking for review and comments. New appeal procedures for National Forest System Projects and activities (36 CFR Part 215) were released June 4, 2003 in the Federal Register. Upon review, 215.5 (6)(b) 2(ii) states that legal notice of the opportunity to comment on a proposed action shall be published in the applicable newspaper of record (*The Chadron Record*). To ensure that all publics have ample opportunity to comment, an official legal notice was published in the Chadron Record newspaper for publication on February 4, 2004. A second 45-day comment period was given.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Upper Niobrara-White Natural Resource District participated in a riparian walk-thru analysis effort in April-May of 2003. The Team Leader and/or pertinent Interdisciplinary team members met with personnel from Chadron State College regarding sensitive plants and their habitats within the PRGA, personnel with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission regarding native fish within the PRGA, and corresponded with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on September 2, 2003 regarding Federally listed species within the PRGA. The Team Leader coordinated with the Nebraska State DEQ representative on August 28, 2003 and March 16, 2004 to discuss the sediment and water quality issues in regards to this project.

Copies of the DEIS summary and Table of contents and availability of the entire DEIS were mailed to 103 individuals, organizations, Tribes, government officials, and/or agencies. Of the

seven letters received on the DEIS, three respondents supported Alternative 3, (Proposed Action), and one respondent supported Alternative 2. Two respondents centered their comments on an inadequate range of reasonable alternatives, failure to follow the Bankhead Jones Tenant Act, and inadequate analysis and assessment of natural resources (riparian, water quality, fish, wildlife, and wilderness values). A full disclosure of these comments can be found in the FEIS, Chapter 5 and Project Files- Index D.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Consistency with the Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan / NFMA

The project area falls within Nebraska National Forest Pine Ridge Geographic Area. This geographic area has specific goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines established that supplement the forestwide standards. A detailed description of the Pine Ridge Geographic Area and its objectives, standards, and guidelines can be found in Chapter 2 of the LRMP, and in the FEIS Section 2.3.4; and Appendix A. I have reviewed the revised LRMP to evaluate whether or not the effects of the selected alternative will meet the standards and guidelines contained in the LRMP and find that the selected alternative does meet these standards and guidelines. I also find that LRMP requirements for threatened, endangered, Forest Service sensitive species, and management indicator species have been met. I find that my decision is consistent with the goals and direction provided in the 2001 Revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Nebraska National Forest, and that no amendment of the Plan is necessary to implement my decision.

Consistency with Other Laws and Policies

I find that my decision is consistent with a wide variety of laws and policies that guide the management of the National Forest System lands. These include, but are not limited to the:

Clean Air Act

The Clean Air Act (CAA) was reviewed and found not to apply and/or have negligible impacts from the action alternatives being proposed. The Environmental Protection Agency in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 42 U.S.C. 4231, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508, and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act (CAA) has rated the DEIS and its environmental implications as a "LO" which corresponds to a "Lack of Objections". No further analysis will be discussed.

Clean Water Act/Water Quality

Alternative 3 will provide for improved water quality conditions in the long-term and over the planning period. My decision will result in reductions of sediment delivery into streams, reduce bacteria loading, and improve riparian areas in the PRGA. Alternative 3 will not impact any Source Water and Protection (SWAP) sites, and analysis of this alternative has taken into account the Federal Guidelines for Water Quality Restoration Plan (WQRP) and Protocol, (FEIS, Section 4.6).

Floodplains and Wetlands - Executive Orders 11988 and 11990

Alternative 3 will result in no significant effects to floodplains and wetlands. Alternative 3 will not propose any construction that would affect wetlands. All existing wetlands would be protected through design features and management requirements.

Endangered Species Act

Determinations disclosed in the Final EIS have concluded that my decision will have no effect on any federally listed species or (*FEIS Section 3.8*). The determination of no effect on federally listed species is based on the lack of suitable habitat within the project area, and incidental and unpredictable observations of these species in the project area.

The USFWS responded to the DEIS on January 6, 2004 and concurred that implementation of the preferred alternative (Alternative 3) will have no effect on federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate species, or their designated critical habitat.

Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

Executive Order 12898 requires all Federal Agencies to make environmental justice part of each agencies mission, by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high, and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations or low income populations. There were no identified effects on minority or low-income populations by Alternative 3 during the analysis and public involvement process discussed in detail in the FEIS.

National Historic Preservation Act - Executive Order 11593

A cultural resources inventory was completed for the project area in 1999. A total of 46 prehistoric and/or historic sites have been identified within the project area, 28 of which are considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Seventeen sites will not be affected because they are located outside activity (forest condition treatment) areas or in RHCA buffer zones. Eleven sites are within treatment areas and are identified for protection and avoidance. Alternative 2 will have no adverse effect activity provided that the eleven sites are avoided by project activities. The State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred and approved with this new determination on 5/24/00 (*Attachment A and Project Files-Exhibit H-3*).

Implementation

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal under 36 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Part 215. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days of the day after notice of this decision is published in the Chadron Record, Chadron, Nebraska.

This decision is also subject to appeal under 36 C.F.R. Part 251 Subpart C by grazing permit holders or applicants, however, grazing holders or applicants must choose either 251 or 215 to appeal, but not both. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days of the day after notice of this decision is published in the Chadron Record, Chadron, Nebraska.

It is an appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be reversed. At a minimum, an appeal must include the following:

Under C.F.R. Part 215:

1. State that the document is an appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR 215;
2. List the name and address of the appellant and, if possible, a telephone number;
3. Identify the decision document by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official;
4. Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects;
5. State how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided, either before or during the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215 and, if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.

The appellant is responsible for submitting an appeal on or before the last day of the appeal filing period. Where there is a question about timeliness, the U.S. Postal Service postmark on a mailed appeal or the time and date imprint on a facsimile appeal will be used to determine timeliness.

A copy of the environmental analysis is available for public review at the Pine Ridge Ranger District, 1240 W. 16th Street, Chadron, Nebraska 69337. Please direct questions about this analysis Jeff Abegglen, Wildlife Biologist at 308-432-4475.

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. Sec. 215, if no appeal is filed, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

Notices of Appeal that do not meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215 will be dismissed.

Under 36 C.F.R. Part 251 Subpart C:

1. The appellant's name, mailing address, and daytime telephone number;
2. The title of type of written instrument involved, the date of application for or issuance of the written instrument, and the name of the responsible Forest Service Officer;
3. A brief description and the date of the written decision being appealed;
4. A statement of how the appellant is adversely affected by the decision being appealed;
5. A statement of the facts of the dispute and the issue(s) raised by the appeal;
6. Specific reference to any law, regulation, or policy that the appellant believes to be violated and the reason for such an allegation;

7. A statement as to whether and how the appellant has tried to resolve the issue(s) being appealed with the Deciding Officer, the date of any discussion, and the outcome of that meeting or contact; and

8. A statement of relief the appellant seeks.

An appellant may also include in the notice of appeal a request for oral presentation or a request for stay of implementation of the decision pending decision on the appeal.

Appeals (including attachments) must be in writing and filed (via regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express deliver, or messenger service) with the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days following the date of publication of a legal notice of this decision in the Chadron Record. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspapers of record is the exclusive means for calculating the 45-day time period to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Per 36 CFR 215, only those individuals or organizations who submitted substantive written or oral comments during the 45-day comment period on the DEIS for the proposed Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area may appeal this decision.

Electronically filed appeals must be in WORD, RTF or PDF format. For electronically mailed comments and appeals, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the comments or appeal, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Where to File an Appeal

Appeal Deciding Officer
USDA Forest Service
Nebraska National Forest
Supervisor's Office
Attention: Don Bright
125 North Main Street
Chadron, Nebraska 69337
Phone: (308) 432-0300
Fax: (308) 432-0309

Email: appeals-rocky-mountain-nebraska@fs.fed.us

Notices of Appeal that do not meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215 will be dismissed.

Implementation Date

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215, if no appeal is filed, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the fifth day from the close of the appeal filing period.

Obtaining Additional Information

The final EIS for the Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Pine Ridge Geographic Area has been placed in the public files of the Pine Ridge Ranger District and is available for public inspection at:

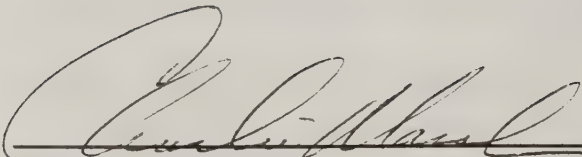
Pine Ridge Ranger District
1240 West 16th Street
Chadron, Nebraska 69337
Phone: (308) 432-4475

Copies of the final EIS are available from the Pine Ridge Ranger District identified above. In addition, copies of the final EIS have been mailed to Federal, state, and local agencies; elected officials; Native American tribes; public libraries; and individuals who provided scoping comments, commented on the draft EIS, or requested the final EIS. A legal notice of the decision has been sent to the newspaper of record (The Chadron Record), and news releases sent to the local radio stations.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact

Jeffrey S. Abegglen
Project Leader
Pine Ridge Ranger District
1240 West 16th Street
Chadron, Nebraska 69337
Phone: 308-432-4475
Email: jsabegglen@fs.fed.us


CHARLIE MARSH
District Ranger
Pine Ridge Ranger District

5/25/04
Date

Supplement A to the Record of Decision

Noted Changes from Draft EIS to Final EIS

Chapter 1.

1.1.1 Land Status History

Land Status History was added to help clarify what authority the PRGA is administered under. The PRGA is administered under the Weeks Act and not the Bankhead Jones Farm Tenant Act.

1.1.3 General Purpose of the Project

Suitable acres were discussed in more detail to clarify the methodology of how these acres were selected to be suitable for grazing activities.

Proposed Action 1.2

Exclosure 33A in King's Canyon Allotment was inadvertently excluded from Table 1-1. It was added as part of the allotment.

Chapter 2

2.2.1 Alternative 1

No Action – No Livestock Grazing

More specific direction was cited from the FSH 2209.13, R2 ID_2209.13_2004-7 Chapter 90 Section 92.31 and/or 94.1 (February 2004) as it relates to the “no action” alternative.

2.2.2 Alternative 2

No Change – Livestock Grazing under Current Allotment Management Plans

More specific direction was cited from the FSH 2209.13, R2 ID_2209.13_2004-7 Chapter 90 Section 92.31 and/or 94.1 (February 2004) as it relates to the “current management” alternative.

Table 2-2 Proposed Actions by Allotment/Management Unit

Proposed action items were corrected in the Big Bordeaux, School Section, Slicker, Soldier Creek, Trunk Butte, and West Ash allotments. Action items were identified in Appendix B but were not included in Table 2-2.

2.3.1 Proposed Action

Further explanation of the “Grazing Management Toolbox” was given. Clarification that management practices alone were not assumed to always meet desired conditions, and that management practices in combination with others would likely meet desired conditions. Also, reference was made to referencing drought guidelines from the University of Nebraska Extension Service when drought management actions warrant.

2.3.2 General Management Requirements

The specific management requirement for a qualified biologist to survey areas during ground disturbing activities to determine absence or presence of nesting migratory birds was added as suggested by the USFWS. If one or more active bird nests cannot be avoided by impact, the USFWS Nebraska Field Office will be contacted.

2.3.5 Monitoring Strategy

The monitoring strategy was clarified by discussing “trigger points” monitored to determine when the proposed management is not meeting resource objectives and when an adaptive management changes is needed.

Short-term monitoring was re-evaluated. Grassland structure monitoring was more appropriate under the long-term monitoring section. Annual allotment inspections were added as part of the annual range readiness indicator. Trigger points were identified for range readiness and riparian/wooded draw monitoring.

Grassland structure monitoring was discussed under the long-term monitoring section. Trigger points were identified and discussed for rangeland health, and riparian/wooded draw long-term monitoring.

2.3.6 Monitoring and Implementation Plan

The monitoring activities for each allotment identified in Appendix B have been moved to this new section of the EIS. To further clarify and demonstrate the feasibility to implement and monitor the proposed activities and management, Tables 2-4a and 2-4b illustrate an implementation schedule and a monitoring schedule. Both include a summary of estimated annual costs.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Phase out livestock grazing in the PRGA in ten years.

A public comment to phase out livestock grazing in the PRGA in ten years was misinterpreted in the Draft EIS. After the commenter brought this to our attention, we have re-evaluated this suggested alternative and discussed the rationale why it was considered but eliminated from further detail.

Develop a 500 and 1000 meter or larger riparian buffer.

Riparian and wooded draw buffer area alternatives have been further discussed to clarify why these suggested alternatives were considered but eliminated from further detail.

Restore wild bison instead of permitted livestock grazing.

A public comment to fully analyze a bison restoration alternative was further discussed and clarified why it was considered but eliminated from further detail

Public comments from the Draft EIS included several new alternatives suggested for full analysis. They include: *Discontinue livestock grazing in Soldier Creek Wilderness Area, Burr Oak Special Interest Area, and bighorn sheep management area; no electric fence construction; and protect wildlife and riparian habitats even more than Alternative 3.* These suggested alternatives were addressed and considered as alternatives but eliminated from further detail. Rational was given in this section of the FEIS.

Chapter 3.

3.2.1 Air and Water - Affected Environment

After review of the Draft EIS by the Environmental Protection Agency, the EPA found that the proposed action had negligible impacts under the Clean Air Act (CAA). This finding was added to this section.

3.3 Riparian & Wooded Draw Resources

3.3.1 Affected Environment

Several small exclosures that were part of the allotment analysis but were not identified specifically in the DEIS. These areas were identified and brought forward into the FEIS.

To clarify the close association between riparian areas and wooded draws, further discussions were added to show the effects to riparian areas and associated wooded draws.

A section called "Determination of Trend" was added to help define and clarify these terms. These definitions would apply to Sections 3.3.2, 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 also. Tables 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3 identify predicted trend changes in riparian/wooded draw areas.

Tables 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3

Additional Management Units were added to the tables due to the small exclosures that were part of the allotment analysis but not identified specifically in the DEIS were brought forward into the FEIS.

3.7.1 Soil and Rangeland Affected Environment

Additional soil information was added to the affected environment section.

Rangeland condition (NRCS methodology) was discussed and cross-walked to ecological seral stages.

The methodology of determining what acres were capable and non-capable acres in regards to grazing was further discussed for clarification.

The DEIS estimated current vegetative grass structure percentages for the PRGA. In the early spring of 2004, grass structure baseline data was collected for the PRGA. This information was used in place of the earlier estimated figures.

3.8.2 Species Selected for Analysis

The Region 2 Forest Service sensitive species list was originally signed by the Regional Forester in 1994 then revised and signed again in November of 2003. Species listed in Table 1.2 represent species from this update.

MIS selection process was further clarified and rational given for species selection and non-selection for analysis as a MIS.

3.8.3 Effects of All Alternatives

Federally Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Species

The determination of no effect on federally listed species was more clearly stated as suggested by the USFWS based on the lack of suitable habitat within the project area, and incidental and unpredictable observations of these species in the project area.

Sensitive Species

Further clarification of the rational for determinations were referenced in Appendix E of the FEIS.

Management Indicator Species

Additional information about the sharp-tailed grouse MIS (current/potential habitat and population trends) were discussed to clarify the predicted effects of the alternatives. Estimated potential habitat for sharp-tailed grouse was replaced with grass structure baseline data collected for the PRGA in early spring of 2004.

Other Priority Species of Local Interest

The management requirement to survey areas during ground disturbing activities to determine absence or presence of nesting migratory birds was added as suggested by the USFWS was included in the discussion for other species of local interest.

3.9 Recreation & Wilderness Affected Environment

Public comment of the Draft EIS suggested that the effects to wilderness qualities be discussed more. Additional information of affected wilderness environment was added, along with the discussion of the effects from the alternatives to wilderness qualities.

3.14 Other Required Disclosures

Consultation with the EPA, regarding the Clean Air Act was noted. Compliance with Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 were also noted.

Appendices

Appendix B Table 1. Comparison Between Alternative 2 and Alternative 3

Corrections were made to the changes between Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 by allotment to reflect items inadvertently left out of this table but were identified in other areas of Appendix B. These corrections include Aristocrat, Aspen, Big Bordeaux, Chadron Creek, Collons, Gobbler, Roberts, School Section, Slicker, Soldier Creek, and Trunk Butte allotments.

Appendix D

Appendix D, Rational for Species Eliminated from Further Analysis, was add to further clarify why some species were eliminated from further analysis. Appendix D is referenced in Chapter 3 Section 3.8.

Appendix E

Appendix E, Rational for Sensitive Species Determinations, was added to further clarify why some alternatives would have a "beneficial" or "may effect individuals..." determination on the sensitive species analyzed. Appendix E is referenced in Chapter 3 Section 3.8.

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1. The first of the two main parts of the book is devoted to a general survey of the history of the subject. The second part is devoted to a detailed study of the various methods of the subject.

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